

3 January 1974

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: West European Reaction to a Possible
Supply of Arms by the US to Portugal
for Use in Africa

Should the US supply arms to Portugal for use in Africa, the West European states and Canada are likely in general to be critical. Many of the Europeans have supported UN resolutions calling for independence for the Portuguese colonies, and all have supported an embargo on arms for use in Portuguese Africa. They would regard the breaking of this embargo by the US as being particularly inopportune. The most negative reactions would come from the Scandinavians and Dutch, but, with the exception of Spain, all the Europeans would in varying degrees regard possible US assistance to Lisbon unfavorably. Most would probably criticize the US publicly.

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France. The French government and press would protest US arms sales to Portugal for use against African insurgents, but some ambiguity in its own position might counsel official restraint in criticizing the US. Paris is periodically criticized for its own deals with Lisbon and its laissez faire position on Portuguese colonialism. But, although France sells equipment such as submarines to Portugal, since 1970 Paris has maintained an embargo on arms that could be used against African insurgents. The government would therefore probably take advantage of this opportunity to score against its domestic opposition and to gain points in black Africa.

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Foreign Minister Jobert publicly reiterated last August France's commitment to the principle of self-determination for the Africans. On the other hand, Jobert held that Portugal, as the administering state, must take the necessary actions in its colonies. To say more, Jobert added, would be interference in the affairs of another state.

West Germany. The majority of Chancellor Brandt's Social Democrats would be up in arms should the US supply military hardware to Portugal. High-level members of the Social Democratic Party recently hosted members of the insurgent movement in Mozambique and called for West German government support of the African liberation movements. This has not been done, but Brandt would come under pressure--just as he did in December 1972 at the time of renewed US bombing in Vietnam--to speak out publicly against a US move to aid Portugal.

Italy. Foreign and domestic political considerations would likely make Rome reluctant to support publicly US aid to Portugal. Factors related to the energy shortage are, for the moment, exerting strong influences on foreign policy decisions, and the fact that the Arab states would react negatively to possible US aid to Portugal would not go unnoticed in Rome. The Italians are particularly sensitive to the views of Libya--Rome's largest single supplier of crude oil--and they will take into account Tripoli's firm support for and recognition of Guinea-Bissau.

At home, the government would feel constrained by the strong pro-rebel position of the country's influential Communist Party. Prime Minister Rumor's center-left coalition is being particularly careful not to antagonize the Communists whose current "soft" opposition policy is one of the elements contributing to the government's moderate progress on economic problems. At the same time, a US decision to permit the transfer of arms to Portuguese colonies would probably be used by Rome as an argument to support its case for US permission to sell to Libya certain armaments manufactured in Italy under US license. This was one of the conditions given by the Libyans when they recently dangled the prospect of "maximum" quantities of oil before the Italians.

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Spain. Madrid's reaction would likely be low key. It would try to avoid taking sides against its Iberian neighbor on such a basic issue as arms to counter the African rebels, even though Madrid views Lisbon's African policy as unrealistic. Spain's support would be tempered, however, by its desire not to differ openly on a matter that the other Europeans with which Spain wants to associate are likely to be strongly critical. Spain's dilemma would be enhanced by its hope to avoid antagonizing the US, whose support Madrid has been courting with regard to possible Spanish ties to NATO.

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Scandinavia.

Critical reaction would be particularly strong in Denmark and Sweden, where public opinion is traditionally sympathetic to "liberation" movements around the world. Danish governments have long felt uncomfortable in consorting with non-democratic and colonial regimes in NATO. Although the Social Democrats are no longer in power in Copenhagen, the more moderate incumbents in a tightly balanced parliament would probably feel it necessary to reflect popular opinion by criticizing the US publicly rather than remaining silent. Although it has recently signaled a desire to improve relations with the US, the Swedish government of Olaf Palme would probably also feel compelled to criticize the US publicly. The Norwegians, who believed it necessary to criticize the Greek government at the recent NATO foreign ministers meeting, would definitely be critical in the NATO forum and would probably also vent their criticism in public.

Benelux, Austria, and Switzerland.

The reaction by political leaders and the populace in the Benelux countries to a US supply of arms to Portugal would be quite negative. In The Netherlands it would border on outrage, since the Dutch strongly support--at least vocally--liberation movements in the Third World that are fighting colonial regimes. The ruling Socialist and Social Christian parties in Belgium would share the Dutch view. In both Belgium and The Netherlands, government leaders have been strongly critical of the authoritarian regime in Lisbon and its membership in NATO. They would regard possible American assistance as a violation of the Alliance's commitment to democratic principles.

Reaction in Austria and Switzerland would be more muted. Austrian Chancellor Kreisky and his Socialist Party colleagues, however, would at least privately condemn the US action in much the same terms as their Socialist counterparts in Belgium and The Netherlands.

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